



Transglossic Language Practices: Young Adults Transgressing Language and Identity in Bangladesh

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of Doctor of Philosophy**

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Certificate of Original Authorship

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student:

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Shaila Sultana". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid, with a large initial 'S'.

Shaila Sultana

Date: 4 August 2014

Acknowledgment

In March 2010, I arrived in Sydney with two young children, aged 8 and 5. I was anxious, apprehensive, and concerned, worrying whether I had the strength and diligence to take up the intense mammoth task of doctoral studies in a foreign land. Over time, my fears were allayed. Countless enlightening and engaging conversations with my supervisor Professor Alastair Pennycook, challenging ethnographic research in Bangladesh amidst political mayhem in Dhaka, the frustrating yet rewarding process of drafting and redrafting chapters, the excruciatingly painful but satisfying process of writing articles for international applied linguistics journals, and the daunting task of single-parenting – and here I am today, in December 2013. Three years and nine months have slipped by and I have barely noticed. The thesis has survived through school musicals, choirs, market days, camping, a graduation ceremony, NAPLAN tests, selective exams and numerous school holidays. In retrospect, this journey to a foreign land has not only been an academic pursuit, kindling my passion for language and my interest in social science research. It has been a personal quest that has allowed me to unearth my prowess and resilience as a mother and a woman.

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Abstract

The thesis provides a counter narrative to the prevailing discourses in Bangladesh that have shown increased concern about the detrimental effect of English on Bangla, the national language, and Bangladeshi identity. It is commonly assumed that young adults are subjugated by the colonial legacy of English, and they are consequently portrayed as passive recipients of popular culture. They are also criticized for their failure to maintain a domain-specific demarcated use of language, that is, English for academic purposes and socioeconomic advancements, and Bangla for local, cultural, and national activities.

Identifying that these key assumptions understate the complexities of young adults' language practices and identity, the thesis offers a critical understanding of the role of English and Bangla in young adults' lives. Drawing on insights from Pennycook's transgressive approach to language and Bakhtin's 'heteroglossia', the thesis proposes the notion of *transglossia*. Going beyond the overt dependence on linguistic features, transglossia appears to have the potential to reveal a sophisticated understanding of language. On the one hand, it provides a theoretical grounding to address the transgression observable in language in the mixing of codes, modes, genres, and a variety of cultural semiotic resources. On the other hand, as a conceptual proposition, it has the capacity to untangle the social, historical, political, ideological, and spatial nature of language. In addition, with its analytical framework, transglossia brings out the values, vested interests, and politics behind language-, class-, and gender-based identifications.

The data are drawn from a three-month long ethnographic research project which included observations, casual face-to-face conversations, virtual conversations on Facebook, interviews, and focus-group discussions of 29 students at a university in Bangladesh. Based on the analysis, the thesis argues in favour of understanding language and identity not in terms of formal systems, such as English or Bangla per se, but in terms of *transglossia*. Young adults actively and reflexively engage with mixtures of codes, modes, genres, and stylisation and pragmatically recontextualise popular cultural texts in their transglossic language practices within the historical and spatial realities of their lives. Ultimately, this thesis advances the recent theorisation of translingual practices in applied linguistics. It also contributes to the field by providing glimpses of the sociocultural dynamics of language in the post-colonial context of Bangladesh, a country very much under-represented in sociolinguistics research.

To transgress is to go beyond the bounds or limits set by a commandment or law or convention, it is to violate or infringe. But to transgress is also more than this, it is to announce and even laudate the commandment, the law or the convention. Transgression is a deeply reflexive act of denial and affirmation. Analytically, then, transgression serves as an extremely sensitive vector in assessing the scope, direction and compass of any social theory.

(Jenks, 2003, p. 2)

Transgression is not the same as disorder; it opens up chaos and reminds us of the necessity of order. But the problem remains. We need to know the collective order, to recognize the edges, in order to transcend them.

(Jenks, 2003, p. 7)